

# Module 8

## Workplace Communication



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# Board of Studies Syllabus Links

## Links to Work Education, Work Studies CEC and Work and the Community Life Skills course

WORK EDUCATION Stage 5		WORK STUDIES CEC Stage 6		WORK AND THE COMMUNITY LIFE SKILLS COURSE Stage 6	
Core 3	Introduction to the Workplace	Core 2	Experiencing Work: an Introduction	8.4	Introduction to Workplace or Community-Based Learning Environments
Elective 1	Workplace Induction	Module 3	Workplace Communication and Inter-personal Skills	8.5	Dealing with Workplace and Community-Based Environment Issues
Elective 11	Workplace Communication				

## Links to Industry Curriculum Framework Courses

This module may be used to support the delivery of Stage 6 Industry Curriculum Framework courses. Teachers should use their professional judgement to determine the relevance of the materials to the units of competency being delivered. The materials should be placed in an industry-specific context.



# 8.1 Interpersonal Communication Skills

## Body Language

People can tell a lot about your attitude simply by the way you stand, sit and walk, and by how you act when you are around others. This is known as *body language*. Your body language is important if you are trying to make a good impression.

Slouching, with your arms crossed and looking around the room or at the floor, makes the person you are talking to think you are not interested in what they have to say.

Standing up tall, facing the person you are speaking to and looking them in the eye are all positive ways of saying: "I am interested in what you have to say."

## Eye Contact

Looking someone in the eye is called *eye contact*. It is a useful way of showing the other person that you are listening to what they have to say.

## Using Your Voice

Another thing that shows your attitude is the way you use your voice. People do not just hear *what* you say; they hear the *way* you say it. If you use a harsh voice or a tone that sounds like you are bored, annoyed or impatient, the person you are speaking to will think that you don't want to talk to them, or are rude.

You also need to be aware of how loudly you are speaking. To speak loudly while having a drink at the club after work may be appropriate; speaking at the same volume in a meeting at work is not appropriate. You need to work out what volume and tone is acceptable for each different situation at work.

### Tips for Good Body Language and Voice

Keep personal space.

Make eye contact.

Sit or stand up straight.

Look and sound interested.

## Personal Space

In our society, people feel uncomfortable if you 'invade' their personal space. This means that if you stand too close to a person, they feel awkward or uneasy. About an arm's distance away is an acceptable amount of space between you and the person you are speaking to.

In the workplace, it is usually unacceptable to touch another person unless it is part of the work you have to do. Touching anyone in an intimate manner, like hugging or kissing them without their permission, is called sexual harassment and is against the law.




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# Interpersonal Communication Skills

## Word Puzzle

Use the boxed words to complete these sentences.

impression	personal space	slouch	volume	attitude
eye contact	body language	touch	length	tone

- 1) How you speak: "I don't like your T \_ \_ \_ ."
- 2) How loudly you speak: V \_ \_ \_ \_ .
- 3) It is generally not acceptable to T \_ \_ \_ \_ another employee.
- 4) The way you sit, stand and walk is called B \_ \_ \_  
L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ .
- 5) The way you communicate shows your A \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ .
- 6) You shouldn't S \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ when talking to others.
- 7) At work, don't invade someone's P \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
S \_ \_ \_ \_ .
- 8) Stand about an arm's L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ away when you are speaking to someone.
- 9) It is important to make a good I \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ .
- 10) When speaking or listening, you should make E \_ \_  
C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ .



## 8.2 Verbal Communication

### Understanding Directions

It is very important to understand directions given to you by your supervisor or co-worker so that you can do your work correctly. If you don't understand the directions given to you, ask for them to be repeated.

The following suggestions will help you to understand directions more easily.

**Look at the person who is giving you the directions.**

Often, that person may be able to tell from the look on your face that you don't understand.

**Give feedback to the person giving the directions.**

If you do understand, let the other person know by nodding, or saying "Okay". If you don't understand, say so. Don't wait for all the directions before you tell the person that you didn't understand the first direction.

**Repeat the directions.**

When the supervisor has finished giving you the directions, repeat them back, so that you both feel confident.

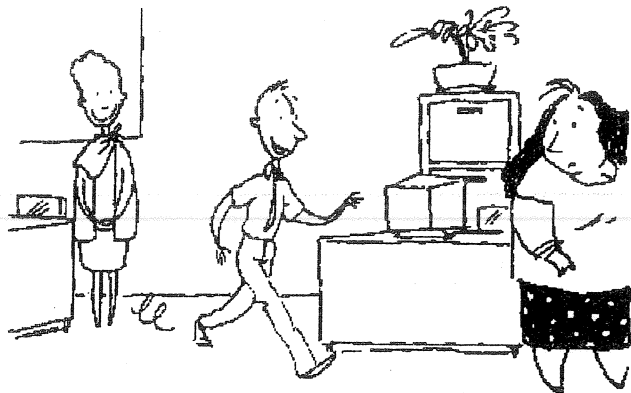
**Say thanks.**

Thank the supervisor for giving you the directions.

### Messages

You may be asked to pass on a message in your workplace when you are unable to write it down.

This may happen when your supervisor or a co-worker is just passing by and remembers something that you need to tell someone else; or it could happen when you are in the middle of some work that you can't stop.



You need to remember who the message is for, and exactly what the message is. If you think you are going to forget the message or get it wrong, you need to tell the person so that they can write it down for you or get someone else to pass it on. It is better to be truthful than to deliver the wrong message.

## Asking Questions

Asking questions in the workplace is a good way to learn new things. However, you need to know how and when to ask questions. Constantly asking questions may disrupt your supervisors or co-workers, and lead them to become frustrated or annoyed.

You may need to ask questions when you:

- need help
- don't understand an instruction
- need information
- need something
- run out of work to do
- are helping another worker to do something.

The following steps may help you to ask a question appropriately, once you have decided that you have to.

### **Decide who to ask.**

Who is the person most likely to know the answer?

### **Decide when to ask.**

If the person is talking to someone else or is busy, it may not be appropriate to ask that person at that time. You may need to ask someone else, or wait until the person is available.

### **Know the question that you want to ask.**

This way, no unnecessary time is lost for you or the other person.

### **Speak and explain clearly.**

### **Say thank you when you get an answer.**

## Interrupting Appropriately

Sometimes it is important that you get an answer to a question quickly, or you may need to give someone an urgent message and cannot wait until they are free. In these cases, you may need to interrupt a person who is talking to someone else or is busy doing something.

### **Interrupting**

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Interrupt politely.         | 3. Give the message.        |
| 2. Explain you have a message. | 4. Say thank you and leave. |

If there is no other choice but to interrupt, you should do the following:

- If the person is in an office or a room, you need to knock on the door.
- After knocking, wait for a moment, then enter the room.
- Excuse yourself and apologise for interrupting. Explain that the interruption was necessary or urgent.
- Ask the question or deliver the message as briefly as possible.
- As soon as you have delivered the message or received the answer, thank the person and leave. Sometimes that person may ask you to stay so that you can deliver an answer to the message.



## Making Introductions

When you come across someone you don't know, you may need to introduce yourself.

To do this, you can follow these steps:

### **Choose the time and place to introduce yourself.**

Don't interrupt when a person is talking to someone else, or is busy doing something.

### **Face the person, look them in the eye and smile.**

### **Greet them.**

If it is a formal type of occasion, you might say "Good afternoon." If it is in the work canteen, you might just say "Hi."

### **Say your first and last names.**

Speak clearly. It might be appropriate to shake hands at this point.

### **Say something about yourself and what you do.**

For example, say: "Hi, I'm Kim Park. I work in the hardware section, on the same floor as you."

### **Handy Hint**

How you greet someone may depend on who they are. For example, a more senior employee may need to be greeted more formally.

## Compliments

### Giving Compliments

If a person you work with has done something well, you may want to give them a compliment. A compliment is one way you can let someone know that they have done something well. Don't give a compliment unless you really mean it, or it won't sound sincere.

Think about the following when giving a compliment:

**Decide what you would like to compliment.**

Be as exact as you can.

**Decide what you want to say.**

**Choose the best time to give the compliment.**

Sometimes it may be a good idea to choose a time when no one else is around, to keep the other person from feeling embarrassed.

**Give the compliment.**

Be friendly and sincere.

### Receiving a Compliment

Sometimes, other people may give you a compliment — for example, when they think you have done well in your work.

If someone gives you a compliment:

**Listen to what the person has to say.**

**Accept the compliment graciously.**

You can do this by smiling to show that you understand that you are being complimented.

**Respond in a positive way.**

Don't 'play down' the person's compliment, even if you are a bit embarrassed. If you say "I didn't really do anything much", the person giving the compliment may feel that you didn't appreciate it.

**Thank the person for the compliment.**

## Criticism

### Giving Criticism

Giving criticism is a way of telling or showing someone how they can improve. You should think carefully before criticising someone. Criticism can be given in a way that hurts a person's feelings, or it can be given in a way that is helpful.

Here is a way to give criticism without hurting a person's feelings:

- Don't call people names, put them down or laugh at them.
- Choose your words as carefully as you can.
- Say something positive before you point out something wrong.
- Don't point out more faults than the person will be able to handle at one time.
- Give the person a chance to respond to your criticism.
- Make some suggestions for improvement.
- Remember to compliment the person if they improve.

## **Accepting Criticism**

Occasionally — especially when you are learning a new job — you will make a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. It may be necessary for your supervisor or co-worker to tell you that you have done something incorrectly or not the best way.

This is an opportunity to learn something new. You should try not to become angry or defensive. Being told about your mistake means that you will not make that mistake again.

By using the following steps, you can turn criticism to your advantage and use it as an opportunity to improve your skills.

**Look at the person who is talking to you.**

**Show that you understand what the criticism is about.**

Do this by nodding, saying "Okay" or asking questions to clarify what you are being criticised for. (If the criticism is incorrect, explain to the person that their information is not accurate, and give them the correct information.)

**Apologise, if necessary.**

**Ask if you can tell your side of the story.**

Use a calm and polite voice. Describe what you did, and why. Don't be defensive. It is important that you don't try to 'get out of trouble' or make excuses, but simply state the facts.

**Ask for suggestions on how to improve or fix the situation.**

**End on a positive note.**

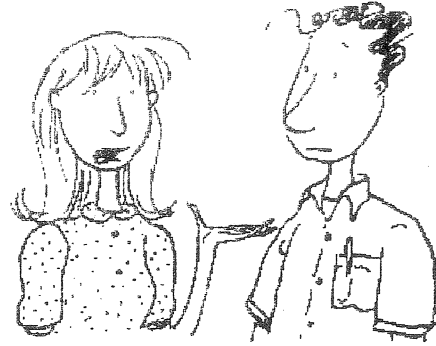
For example, say that you will try the suggested solution next time.

## **Apologising**

Sometimes, something will go wrong at work and you will need to apologise for what has happened. It is better to admit your mistakes and make it right by apologising rather than pretend it did not happen or try to blame someone else.

These are the steps to follow when you need to apologise to someone:

- Greet the person. Use their name.
- Ask the person if you may speak to them for a moment.
- Explain the situation, and why you want to apologise.
- Apologise.
- End with a positive statement.



## Chain of Command

If you have a problem at work, it is important to know who to speak to in order to get the problem fixed. This person is easier to find in a small business with few staff.

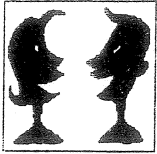
If you work in a large business, there might be a 'chain of command'. This is a way of describing who comes next in the line of supervision.

There may be times when you go to your supervisor about a problem but don't get the results you were looking for. In this case, you will need to know who is next in the chain of command — in other words, who your supervisor's boss is — so that you can seek a solution to your problem.

Not all problems will be fixed in your favour. If a decision is made that is not in your favour, don't continue to complain about it unless you believe it infringes your rights as an employee.

Remember that if you want to speak to someone higher in the chain of command, it must be for an important or serious reason. The higher up the 'chain' a person is, the more people they are responsible for. Often, they do not have time to solve minor problems that should be dealt with further down the chain.

Some workplaces have a procedure for using the command chain. You will need to learn this procedure and follow it. For example, it may not be acceptable to see your supervisor's boss without giving them advance notice or making an appointment.



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# Verbal Communication

### True or False?

Circle whether each statement is true or false. If false, rewrite it correctly.

- 1) There is no need to look at a person when they are talking to you. **True / False**

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- 2) Don't ask for directions to be explained, as you will look silly. **True / False**

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- 3) Show that you understand what has been said to you by saying so or nodding your head. **True / False**

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- 4) If you don't think you will be able to remember a message, tell the person who gave it to you. **True / False**

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- 5) Don't ask questions when you need help or you run out of work to do. **True / False**

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- 6) Never interrupt people when they are speaking. **True / False**

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## 8.3 Communicating as a Team Member

At work, you will need to work as part of a team, rather than by yourself. *Teamwork* is learning to communicate with your workmates and helping them out when you can. Then they will do the same for you. You can only get your job done if everyone else is doing their job, and vice versa.

Teamwork is a very effective work practice. Working as part of a team means that you are able to do your part of the task, that you understand the roles of the other people in the team, and that you know how your part affects the total outcome.

As part of a team, you can:

- achieve a common goal — for example, getting work finished on time, or faster
- share ideas
- solve problems
- make recommendations
- make decisions
- develop a plan of action.

**T**ogether  
**E**veryone  
**A**chieves  
**M**ore

### Roles within a Team

As a team member, you should know what tasks you are expected to perform. This may be called your job role or work description. Your supervisor will probably help with working out the roles of each team member.

In order to work out what role you should have in the team, it helps to be aware of what you are good at and what you may need help with. It usually works best if each team member does work that they are good at. The roles performed by each person may change depending on what work needs to be done on a daily or weekly basis. Sometimes members of the team may need to become good at doing new tasks in order to help the team.

It is also important to be able to get on with the people in your team, to be able to talk to them, and to find out what they are doing and how it will affect your part of the task. You also need to be reasonable and cooperative with team members. This does not mean that your ideas are not valuable; it means that all team members' ideas must be respected.

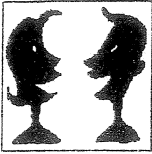


## Teamwork

To be a good team member, you must:

- help other team members
- tell others of changes in your work routine
- be aware of changes to others' work routine
- ask for assistance when necessary
- use good communication and interpersonal skills
- be willing to improve your skills and learn new skills
- be flexible when helping other team members, especially when they are really busy and need extra help
- be honest
- be committed to the goals and work of your team.






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## Communicating as a Team Member

### A. Being Part of a Team

**In the following scenarios, identify the actions that could harm the team effort. How could each situation be solved?**

- 1) Jenni, Cathy, Ramson and Lorenza are working together on a school project. They are meeting every second afternoon to check how they are going in collecting information. Lorenza hasn't shown up at the last two meetings, and she won't explain why. However, she says not to worry — she is doing the work.
- 2) Jack plays soccer with the Maxville Rams. They are coming up to grand final time. Jack is a good player, but he likes to score the goals and tends to keep the ball in his possession. He doesn't like being pestered by other team members who want to train with him so that they can learn some of his skills.
- 3) Astra, Kelly, Victor and Maria all work for a major company in the city. Kelly has been snowed under by paperwork, and hasn't been able to do her other duties. Maria suggests to the others that they could help, as they are not so busy. Victor disagrees, saying: "If Kelly wanted help, she'd ask!" Astra says that she has done her own work, and so should Kelly.
- 4) Sally has been put in charge of organising a function for her firm. She has asked Ron to organise the invitations, and Gary to handle the catering. She will book accommodation for visitors herself. Ron and Gary don't feel confident with what they have been given to do. They know a lot about the different types of accommodation in the area, and feel that they could be of more use organising that.

	Actions which could harm	Possible solutions
1		
2		
3		
4		

## B. Individual or Team?

Take some time to list the advantages and disadvantages of working in a team. Then do the same thing for working individually.

Working in a Team	
Advantages	Disadvantages

Working Individually	
Advantages	Disadvantages

Overall, which did you decide was the best way to work?

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## 8.4 Written Communication

### Taking Messages

As an employee, you may need to take messages from customers or from co-workers. You need to take a message when the person asked for is busy or out of the office.

It is important to get all the information written down correctly, so that the person the message is for will be able to act on it quickly and efficiently.

### Steps in Taking a Message

**Ask the caller if they wish to leave a message.**

The caller may not wish to leave a message when they find out that the person they are looking for is not available. But you must find out by asking. For example: "Mr Takis is out of the office at the moment; would you like to leave a message?"

**Have pen and paper ready to take the message.**

If you don't have these things, politely ask the caller to wait until you find them. Don't try to remember the message; you may forget part of it, or mix up details like phone numbers.

**Write down the caller's details.**

Ask the person their name, and ask them to spell it. If they want to be called back, take their phone number.

**Take the message.**

Write the message as precisely as possible.

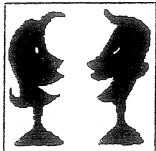
**Repeat all the information back to the caller.**

Make sure what you have written down is correct.

**End the call.**

Thank the caller and tell them you will deliver the message as soon as possible.

**Deliver the message as soon as possible.**



## Written Communication

## Fill- and Find-a-Word

Complete the sentences, then find your answers in the puzzle below.

- 1) You may need to take \_\_\_\_\_ from customers and co-workers.
- 2) You need to take messages for people who are not \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) When taking a message, be sure to \_\_\_\_\_ it down.
- 4) To take a message, keep a \_\_\_\_\_ and paper handy.
- 5) It is important to write the information down \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6) First ask for the caller's \_\_\_\_\_. If they want to be called back, you will also need their phone \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ the message back to the caller after you take it.
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ the caller and tell them you will \_\_\_\_\_ the message as soon as possible.

M	E	S	S	A	G	E	S	T	A
E	T	K	K	N	A	H	T	Y	I
L	I	N	P	G	M	E	S	L	S
B	R	E	P	E	A	T	A	T	G
A	W	E	M	A	N	E	S	C	I
L	S	A	L	N	U	M	B	E	R
I	L	P	A	R	T	O	F	R	T
A	H	D	E	L	I	V	E	R	E
V	J	O	B	S	O	G	E	O	T
A	T	H	E	M	R	I	G	C	H

## 8.5 Conflict Resolution

A *conflict* is a struggle between two opposing forces, ideas, or plans of action.

Conflict in the workplace usually involves two or more people. These people may have different ideas or opinions about a particular situation or a plan of action. *Conflict resolution* is the process of coming to a solution that all of the conflicting parties can accept.

It can be easy to get angry when someone does not agree with the way you want to do something, or with what you think about something. Getting angry does not usually solve the problem, but makes it worse. You may say or do something when you are angry that you would not normally say or do if you were calm.

It is important to resolve conflicts in the workplace. Leaving conflicts unresolved can lead to the people involved finding it difficult to work with each other or the job not being completed correctly. Conflict may also end in job loss if the situation is not resolved.

### Steps to Resolve Conflict

The following steps may help you to find a solution to workplace conflict.

**Control your emotions.**

If you are getting angry, take yourself out of the situation until you calm down.

**Express your ideas assertively, but not aggressively.**

Don't let the other person's behaviour (such as shouting) stop you from expressing your opinion. You need to stay calm.

**Use two-way communication.**

Listen to what the other person has to say. Let them respond to what you have to say.

**Find a solution.**

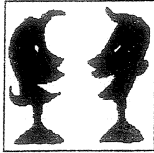
Discuss alternatives for resolving the conflict, or work towards a compromise. A compromise is an agreement by both sides to adjust their thoughts, actions or opinions in order to reach a solution.

**Getting nowhere?**

If the conflict cannot be resolved and/or you are getting angry, tell the person that you need to take some time to calm down and think about the situation. Say that you would like to talk about it again later.

**Problem still there?**

Sometimes, even after you have discussed the situation a couple of times, you still can't reach a solution. This is when you need to call in a third person — perhaps your supervisor — to help solve the conflict.



## Conflict Resolution

### Dealing with Conflict

Circle the best response.

- 1) When dealing with conflict, it is best to:
  - a) control your emotions and talk the matter through
  - b) deal with the matter aggressively
  - c) not let the other person get a word in
  - d) wait for the trouble to blow over.
- 2) A *compromise* is:
  - a) when you give in
  - b) a way of expressing your ideas
  - c) when both sides agree to adjustments
  - d) a person who helps to solve conflicts.
- 3) A *conflict* is:
  - a) when you can't decide between cake or biscuits
  - b) an argument
  - c) when you express your ideas assertively
  - d) a struggle between people with different ideas or opinions.
- 4) If a conflict cannot be resolved, you need to:
  - a) force the other person to change their mind
  - b) tell the person you need to take time to think about the situation
  - c) call in a third person to help solve the conflict
  - d) both (b) and (c).



## 8.6 Communicating with Customers

### Face to Face

Customers are very important people to all businesses. Without them, a business would not exist. When customers leave, they should feel satisfied they have received the goods or services they wanted, and were treated well in the process.

#### Remember

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- Helping a customer is more important than anything else you have to do.
  - It will not just be *what* you say but the *manner* in which you approach the customer that will have an effect on them.
  - When you see a customer, approach them and ask if you may help them.
  - Some people will know what they want and you will be able to assist them immediately; others may wish to 'look around'. These customers can become annoyed if you pester them before they are ready. However, if a customer says they don't need help for the moment, be careful not to ignore them afterwards; check again after they have had a chance to look for what they want.
  - Be ready to answer questions. If you don't know the answer, tell the customer that you will find out. Do this as quickly as possible — customers don't like to be kept waiting. If you do know the answer, give it in a direct and friendly way. Keep to the point — customers do not want to hear information that is not relevant. However, they will appreciate extra information about the product or service they are enquiring about.
  - Once you have assisted the customer, be prompt in completing the sale, if this is part of your job. Once a customer has made a decision, they do not want to be kept waiting by things they may see as unimportant, such as filling in forms or wrapping up goods.
  - Dealing with a customer may not necessarily be over when the customer has left. You may need to follow up by ordering goods or making delivery arrangements. This is called 'after-sales service' and is very important for ensuring customer satisfaction. The quality of after-sales service may determine whether a customer comes back, or whether they recommend your company to others.
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## On the Phone

Customers may make enquiries or buy goods over the phone. Since you have no face-to-face contact with these customers, you need to sound interested in what they have to say, as well as say the right things.

### Remember

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- Answer the phone as promptly as possible. Waiting for the phone to be answered is like standing around in a store waiting for someone to attend to you. If you take a long time to answer, it gives the customer the impression that they are not important to the company.
- Give a suitable greeting (such as "Good morning"), then tell the customer the name of the company and your name. Ask how you may help them.
- Be ready to talk. Stop what you are doing and concentrate on the customer's enquiry. Take notes if you need to.
- Use a helpful and friendly voice. Speak clearly and not too fast. Don't use slang or offensive language.
- Help the customer if you can. Be efficient and courteous, and answer questions directly. Don't say too much — customers are busy people, too. If you need to get back to the customer with a price or some other information, do it as quickly as possible.
- If you are unable to help the customer, tell them that you will see if someone is available who can help. If no one is available, take a message. Make sure you deliver the message promptly.
- End the call politely and let the customer hang up first.



## Customer Complaints

Sometimes customers complain about the product or service they received. Customers who want to complain can be annoyed, or even angry. It is important that you deal with customer complaints correctly; even a customer who is upset can be satisfied if they receive prompt attention.

When dealing with customer complaints face-to-face, make sure your actions as well as your words show that you are interested in helping the customer.

### Remember

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- Stop what you are doing, look at the person and give them your full attention. The customer will only become more annoyed if they think you are not concentrating on their complaint.
  - Listen to what the customer has to say. Don't become defensive if they are angry; remain polite.
  - Show the customer that you understand their problem by repeating it to them.
  - Follow your workplace's customer complaints procedure, if you know it. If not, decide whether you can solve the problem easily or whether your supervisor should be called to assist.
  - Let the customer know how you are going to help.
  - If you need help from your supervisor, explain the problem with the customer present, if possible. This saves the customer having to repeat themselves; it shows the customer that you were listening and it gives them the opportunity to add anything that they feel is important.
  - Once your supervisor is looking after the customer, return to your work and allow the supervisor to complete the enquiry.
  - Remember that a satisfied customer is much more likely to return in the future.
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## Communicating with Customers

### Solve the Situation

In groups, read over the following customer service situations and come up with solutions. Be ready to justify the choices your group makes.

#### To Help You -- Starting Points

Ask questions.

Leave the customer alone for a moment, but keep an eye on them.

Listen carefully.

Stop what you are doing.

Take the customer's details.

Get your supervisor.

Say that you will find the information needed.

- 1) Katie approaches a customer in her shop. The customer says he is just looking. What should Katie do?
- 2) Heather approaches a customer who says she would like to return a faulty item. What should Heather do?
- 3) Matthew answers the phone in his office. A customer wishes to order an item from a catalogue. What should Matthew do?
- 4) A customer asks Juan to help him select a present for his granddaughter. What should Juan do?
- 5) A customer asks Nadia for an item. Nadia knows it has been ordered but hasn't arrived yet. What should she do?
- 6) Vivian is having difficulty with a customer's complaint. What should she do?
- 7) A customer asks Murat a question, and he doesn't know the answer. What should Murat do?

